

IN THE CLAIMS:

Please amend the claims as follows:

1. (Currently Amended) A method for link level alignment of ~~processing modules~~ processor cards in a distributed processing environment, the method comprising:
 - (a) at a first ~~processing module~~ processor card within a telecommunications signaling platform, sending an alignment request message to a second ~~processing module~~ processor card within a telecommunications signaling platform;
 - (b) including, in the alignment request message, at least one link level communications protocol version supported by the first ~~processing module~~ processor card;
 - (c) at the second ~~processing module~~ processor card, receiving the alignment request message, selecting a link level communications protocol version based on the version in the alignment request message and parameter values for that version;
 - (d) sending an alignment grant message from the second ~~processing module~~ processor card to the first ~~processing module~~ processor card including the selected link level communications protocol version and the parameter values;
 - (e) at the first ~~processing module~~ processor card, receiving the alignment grant message, selecting link level communications parameter values based on the parameters in the alignment grant message and sending an

alignment grant acknowledgement message including the selected parameter values to the second ~~processing-module~~ processor card; and

- (f) sending messages between the first and second ~~processing-module~~ processor cards using the selected link level communications protocol version and parameter values, sending messages between the first processor card and a third processor card using a link level communications protocol version and parameters that are different from the link level communications protocol and version used for link level communications between the first and second processor cards and wherein steps (a)-(f) are performed by SS7 link interface modules in a signal transfer point.

2. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein sending an alignment request message includes sending an alignment request (ARQ) link status signal unit (LSSU) including a payload, the payload including the link level communications protocol version.
3. (Canceled)
4. (Canceled)
5. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1 comprising sending an alignment grant message from the first ~~processing-module~~ processor card to ~~[[a]]~~ the third processing-module processor card within the telecommunications signaling platform ~~[[that]], wherein the third processor card~~ does not support link level communications protocol parameter negotiation.

6. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 5 comprising, at the third processing module processor card, formulating an alignment grant message and forwarding the alignment grant message to the first processing-module processor card.
7. (Canceled)
8. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 6 ~~comprising performing link level communications~~ wherein sending messages between the first and third processing-modules processor cards includes using a default set of link level communications protocol parameters supported by the first and third processing modules processor cards.
9. (Canceled)
10. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1 wherein step (a) occurs independently of application data that the first ~~processing-module~~ processor card has to send.
11. (Currently Amended) A method for negotiating link level communications parameters between ~~processing-modules~~ processor cards in a distributed ~~processing-system~~ telecommunications signaling platform, the method comprising:
 - (a) exchanging messages between first and second ~~processing-modules~~ processor cards for establishing link level communications between the first and second ~~processing-modules~~ processor cards, the messages including link level communications protocol parameters supported by the first and second ~~processing-modules~~ processor cards;

- (b) agreeing on a common set of link level communications protocol parameters usable by the first and second ~~processing-modules~~ processor cards; ~~[[and]]~~
 - (c) establishing link level communications between the first and second ~~processing-modules~~ processor cards using the common set of parameters; and
 - (d) establishing link level communications between the first and a third processor card using a link level communications protocol and parameters different from those used for the link level communications between the first and second processor cards, wherein steps (a)-(d) are implemented by SS7 link interface modules within a signal transfer point.
12. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 11 wherein exchanging messages between first and second ~~processing-modules~~ processor cards includes exchanging link status signaling units (LSSUs) between the first and second ~~processing-modules~~ processor cards.
13. (Canceled)
14. (Canceled)
15. (Canceled)
16. (Canceled)
17. (Original) The method of claim 11 wherein the link level communications protocol parameters include at least one of a retransmission algorithm and retransmission timers.

18. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 11 wherein the link level communications protocol parameters include data rates supported by the first and second ~~processing-modules~~ processor cards.
19. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 11 wherein exchanging messages between the first and second ~~processing-modules~~ processor cards includes exchanging the messages independently of application data ready to be sent by the first and second ~~processing-modules~~ processor cards.
20. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 11 comprising exchanging messages between the first ~~processing-module~~ processor card and ~~[[a]] the third processing module~~ processor card ~~[[that]]~~, wherein the third processor card does not support link level communications parameter negotiation and wherein establishing link level communications between the first and third ~~processing-modules~~ processor cards includes using a default set of parameters supported by the third ~~processing-module~~ processor card.
21. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 20 wherein exchanging messages between the first and third ~~processing-modules~~ processor cards includes exchanging link status signal units (LSSUs) between the first and third ~~processing-modules~~ processor cards.
22. (Canceled)
23. (Canceled)
24. (Canceled)
25. (Canceled)

26. (Currently Amended) A system for link level alignment of ~~processing modules~~ processor cards in a distributed processing system, the system comprising:
- (a) first and second ~~processing modules~~ processor cards within a telecommunications signaling platform coupled to a common bus and supporting link level communications parameter negotiation; and
 - (b) a third ~~processing module~~ processor card coupled to the bus and within the telecommunications signaling platform, the third ~~processing module~~ processor card not supporting link level communications protocol parameter negotiation, wherein the first and second ~~processing modules~~ processor cards are adapted configured to negotiate link level communications protocol parameters with each other and to communicate with each other using the negotiated parameters and wherein the first and second ~~processing modules are adapted to~~ processor cards communicate with the third ~~processing module~~ processor card using a default set of link level communications protocol parameters supported by the third ~~processing module~~ processor card and wherein the first, second, and third processor cards comprise SS7 link interface modules within a signal transfer point.
27. (Currently Amended) The system of claim 26 wherein the first, second, and third ~~processing modules each~~ processor cards comprise SS7 link interface modules or a data communications module for sending and receiving IP telephony signaling messages over IP signaling links.
28. (Canceled)

29. (Canceled)
30. (Currently Amended) The system of claim 26 wherein the first processing module is adapted to send processor card sends an alignment request message to the second processing module processor card to negotiate a link level communications protocol version.
31. (Canceled)
32. (Canceled)
33. (Canceled)
34. (Currently Amended) The system of claim 26 wherein the first and second processing modules are adapted to processor cards discover that the third processing module processor card does not support link level communications parameter negotiation by exchanging link status signal units (LSSUs) with the third processing module processor card.
35. (Currently Amended) The system of claim 34 wherein the first and second processing modules are adapted to processor cards negotiate the link level communications protocol parameters by exchanging LSSUs to negotiate a parameter exchange protocol and to negotiate the parameters using the parameter exchange protocol.
36. (Currently Amended) The system of claim 34 wherein the first and second processing modules are adapted to processor cards exchange messages for negotiating the link level communications protocol parameters independently of application data ready to be sent by the first and second processing modules processor cards.